It was late evening when a respectful slave awakened them. Spock issued rapid orders and clothing was brought for both of them, a richly embroidered robe for the Vulcan, and a tunic of thick, heavy silk for his slave.

"You will dress like this in public. Your beauty will be admired, but I do not choose that others should look upon you too freely."

Kirk smiled at the note of jealousy in Spock's voice, then laughed as the hot, caressing hands opened the carefully arranged tunic, stroking his bare skin.

"In my rooms, however," Spock said, laughing in turn, "you will go naked." Before they became too aroused, he closed the tunic and tied the sash firmly. "Come, my father will be waiting."

Not only Sarek, but many of Spock's family were waiting in the dining room when Kirk entered shyly at his master's heels. Spock had explained the vast, rambling ancestral home housed many lesser branches of the family. Sarek was head of the clan, with Spock as his direct hair, while Spock's three year old son ensured the continuation of the direct line of descent.

Each of the Vulcans was attended by a slave--Kirk was the only Human--and to his surprise there were a number of Vulcan women present. Spock joined the group at the table, and Kirk took up position beside his chair, kneeling with his head respectfully lowered. He could not resist an occasional galace around him, however, and his attention soon became fixed on the group of women sitting together.

One of them, young, and extremely beautiful, was addressed by her companions as T'Pring, and it was Kirk's turn to feel an unexpected jealousy. This was the woman who was to share his master's bed Household slaves served the food, so he had ample opportunity to watch, and Spock, he now saw, paid her no attention, though Kirk could not be sure whether this was do to lack of interest, or merely Vulcan custom.

When the Vulcans had finished eating, their plates were handed to their slaves. Most simply passed over their leavings, but a few, including Spock, called for the serving dishes and made sure their slaves had a good meal.

The group then moved into a large, comfortably furnished hall, where they settled for general conversation. Kirk, copying the other slaves, curled up at his master's feet. He took little interest in the talk that flowed around him, for it seemed to be of family matters. Instead he watched the faces with interest, for these were the first Vulcans he had seen, aside from slavers and warrior and he wanted to understand Vulcans in their normal setting.

One of the house slaves knelt before Spock, respectfully offering a basket of fruit. The Vulcan took two pieces and handed one to Kirk, who found it sweet and delicious.

"You spoil that slave, Spock."

"Perhaps, Stonn, but he repays me...in many ways," Spock looked up lazily, acknowledging the arrival of a Vulcan of his own age who took a seat close by. The newcomer was attended by a green-skinned female, who eyed Kirk with distain.

"I don't know how you can endure a man in your bed," Stonn continued with the air of a man resuming an interrupted argument. "Surely a female..."

"Leave your cousin alone, Stonn,," one of the elderly Vulcan women interrupted. "You know that Spock is not permitted to touch a woman, apart from siring children."

"Your pardon, Aunt." Stonn rose and bowed. "I meant no offense, Spock."

"None taken."

The woman moved to join them, and Spock rose until she was seated.

"I congratulate you, nephew. You have a beauty there, one of the finest pleasure slaves I've ever seen, and I am considered a good judge. You wouldn't lend him to comfort a poor old woman?"

"I regret, Aunt T'Kara," Spock smiled affectionately. "After a night with you he might be reluctant to return to my bed."

"Ha! Flatterer!" The woman laughed. "If I were twenty years younger, I'd make sure he was. I always had an eye for a pretty pet."

Kirk stared, unable to make sense of the position of women in this society. Spock had spoken of arranged marriages, a bride-gift, a woman selected to bear the child of a man not her husband--and yet T'Kara associated with men on equal terms, and was even deferred to. Nor did her age seem to explain it, for he saw now that Sarek was conducting an animated discussion with a young woman who had been sitting with T'Pring. Not wishing to be caught staring, he returned his attention to Spock.

"He is more than a pet, Aunt," Spock reached down to toy absently with Kirk's hair. "His mind is as fascinating as his body."

"And I was always told that Human males were barbarians! You'd better look to him tonight, Spock, or I might walk in my sleep and find myself in your rooms."

"Lashmi guards what is mine." Spock's tone was light, but his voice held a not of warning and his fingers tightened possessively in Kirk's hair. "However, you are correct in one thing, I must see him confined for the night."

Back in his rooms Spock looked at Kirk steadily. "I have arranged with my father that only castrates attend you, and Lashmi will stand guard, so you will be safe here until I return. But first," he reached out and unfastened Kirk's tunic and removed it. For a moment he studied the naked body, then he pulled Kirk into a fierce embrace, his hands caressing the smooth buttocks, sliding up his back. Kirk clung to him, offering his mouth to the descending lips that claimed him in a dizzying kiss that left him weak, faint, and trembling. Spock wrenched away with a groan and stepped back.

"Until tomorrow," he whispered, and was gone.

Alone, Kirk prowled the room restlessly. Spock's touch had inflamed him, but there would be no relief that night, and when he lay down at last on the ornate bed, sleep eluded him.

Despite his efforts not to think of it, his mind persisted in straying to Spock, to what his master was doing, and jealousy of T'Pring burned in him. He groaned, feeling the dull ache in his